

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 IO-13 OMB-01 CIAE-00 PM-05 INR-10
L-03 ACDA-12 NSAE-00 PA-01 SS-15 SP-02 USIA-06
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FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5501
SECDEF WASHDC
INFO DA WASHDC
DSAA WASHDC
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER
USNMR SHAPE
USMISSION USNATO

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 05141

SECDEF FOR ISA/OSDR&E

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MARR, MPOL, NATO, BE
SUBJECT: BELGIAN DEFENSE BUDGET

REF: BRUSSELS 3150 (NOTAL)

1. MEETINGS OF THE MINISTERIAL AD HOC BUDGET REVIEW COMMITTEE (BRUSSELS 3015) ARE CONTINUING IN AN EFFORT TO FIND RESOURCES TO USE TO FILL A 1978 CURRENT BUDGET SHORTFALL ESTIMATED BY DIFFERENT SOURCES AS TOTALLING 65 TO 100 BILLION BF.

2. WELL-PLACED SOURCES IN THE MINISTRIES OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENSE HAVE REVIEWED FOR US WHAT THE LIKELY IMPACT MIGHT BE ON THE BUDGET FOR NATIONAL DEFENSE AND HOW CERTAIN SPECIFIC PROGRAMS MIGHT BE AFFECTED.

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3. THE ANNUAL INCREASE IN THE BELGIAN NATIONAL DEFENSE BUDGET HAD BEEN PROJECTED FOR TEN YEARS WITH AN ANNUAL INCREASE OF 4 PERCENT IN CONSTANT TERMS. THIS NO LONGER APPEARS FEASIBLE IN VIEW OF THE BUDGET CRISIS. CURRENT EFFORTS ARE DIRECTED TO MAINTAINING A 2 PERCENT ANNUAL INCREASE IN CONSTANT TERMS.

4. IF THE NATIONAL DEFENSE BUDGET CAN BE MAINTAINED WITH A 2 PERCENT INCREASE, IT WOULD PROBABLY BE POSSIBLE FOR BELGIUM TO PARTICIPATE IN HAWK-HELP (BRUSSELS 4256); TO ACQUIRE THE ARMOURED VEHICLES IT NEEDS TO REPLACE ITS AGING FLEET (BRUSSELS 4429), THOUGH A DEFERRED PAYMENT SCHEDULE FOR TWO TO THREE YEARS WOULD NEED TO BE WORKED OUT; AND TO DO SOMETHING TO MEET THE SALARY DEMANDS OF THE MILITARY (BRUSSELS 4379). IT DOES NOT APPEAR LIKELY THAT BELGIUM WOULD BE ABLE TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE AWACS PROGRAM (BRUSSELS 1513). THE F-16 PROGRAM, WHICH IS COSTING HEAVILY IN INITIAL OUTLAYS, IS NOT IN DANGER.

5. COMMENT: WE WERE NOT TOLD WHETHER THE PROBABLE SCALING BACK OF THE DEFENSE BUDGET FROM A FOUR TO TWO PERCENT ANNUAL INCREASE WOULD BE A SHORTRUN MEASURE OR WHETHER IT WOULD CONTINUE AS PART OF A TEN YEAR PROJECTION. AT THIS POINT, GIVEN THE ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTIES IN BELGIUM, IT IS LIKELY THAT NO LONGTERM PROJECTIONS ARE BEING WORKED OUT. CHAMBERS

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